

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEGUCI 02354 182220Z
ACTION ARA-14

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R 171837Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 397
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 2354

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, HO
SUBJ: ELECTION DATE RECEDING

REF: (A) TEGUCIGALPA A-13 (B) TEGUCIGALPA 317 (NOTAL)

1. HONDURAS' NATIONAL ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL (TNE) WHICH IS CHARGED WITH ORGANIZING ELECTIONS FOR A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY HAS YET TO ESTABLISH AN ACCEPTED OR ACCEPTABLE DEFINITION OF ITS ROLE. MOST RECENT SYMPTOMS OF CONFUSION INCLUDE A CONTINUING DELAY (REFAIR) IN APPROVAL OF ITS BUDGET, BICKERING AMONG THE TWO TRADITIONAL PARTIES AND THE TWO NEW ONES OVER REPRESENTATION ON DEPARTMENTAL AND LOCAL TRIBUNALS, AND A POTENTIALLY MORE SERIOUS ARGUMENT OVER WHETHER THE TNE AS AN INSTITUTION OR SOME GOVERNMENT BUREAU WILL ISSUE NEW ID CARDS. THIS HAS LED TO SPECULATION THAT THE ELECTORAL LAW WILL BE AMENDED TO REMOVE AMBIGUITIES.

2. ALTHOUGH THE TNE COMPLETED STUDY OF A NATIONAL REGISTRATION LAW WITHIN TWO MONTHS, AS REQUIRED BY THE ELECTORAL LAW (REF B), IT HAS YET TO BE PROMULGATED BY THE CABINET. LAST WEEK, GENERAL MELGAR AND THE TNE FOUND THEMSELVES IN A SPAT OVER RESPONSIBILITIES.
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PAGE 02 TEGUCI 02354 182220Z

ITY FOR THE OBVIOUS DELAYS THAT ARE OCCURRING IN PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS WITH EACH BLAMING THE OTHER. TNE PRESIDENT, VIRGILIO GALVEZ, IN A STATEMENT INTENDED TO CALM MATTERS, EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT THE BUDGET WOULD BE APPROVED SOON AND WORK COMMENCE IN EARNEST.

3. RESPONDING TO GENERAL MELGAR'S IMPLICATION THAT IT IS THE

POLITICAL PARTIES ON THE TNE SLOWING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, THE LIBERAL PARTY (PLY) ISSUED A STRONGLY WORDED COMMUNIQUE DATED MAY 13 ACCUSING THE MILITARY REGIME OF DELIBERATELY SEEKING TO PROLONG ITS RULE. THE PLH BLAMED PERSONS NEAR THE CHIEF OF STATE FOR ATTEMPTING TO "ECONOMICALLY ASPHYXIATE" THE TNE AND CONTINUE GENERAL MELGAR IN OFFICE. THE COMMUNIQUE CALLED FOR THE ARMED FORCES TO HONOR ITS PROMISE AND ENDED PREDICTING "DAYS OF ANGUISH IF THE GOOD FAITH OF THE HONDURAN PEOPLE IS MOCKED."

4. COMMENT: EVEN WITH THE FIRST FLUSH OF OPTIMISM OVER PASSAGE OF AN ELECTORAL LAW THAT SET THE COUNTRY ON THE ROAD TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, IT WAS RECOGNIZED THAT ORGANIZATION AND REGISTRATION WOULD TAKE MOST, IF NOT ALL, OF 1978. NEARLY FIVE MONTHS AFTER APPROVAL OF THE ELECTORAL LAW, NO VISIBLE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE AND GENERAL MELGAR HAS NOT MENTIONED THE 1979 TARGET DATE FOR SOME TIME, ALTHOUGH HE HAS REITERATED THE PROMISE OF ELECTIONS. WHILE REFLECTING GROWING CONCERN OVER THE DELAYS, EVEN PLH STATEMENT IMPLIES HOPE OF EVENTUAL COMPLIANCE. PUBLIC CONFIDENCE SO FAR ALSO APPEARS NOT TO BE SHAKEN, ALTHOUGH INCREASINGLY CONCERNED. THE PRESENT FLOUNDERING DOES NOT, HOWEVER, HELP THE REGIME'S PUBLIC IMAGE AT A TIME WHEN IT IS ALSO UNDER ATTACK FOR A VARIETY OF SCANDALS AND MAY IN FACT BE PARTLY DUE TO THE MILITARY'S NOT BEING ABLE TO CONCENTRATE ON ELECTORAL POLICY IN THE FACE OF ITS OTHER PROBLEMS, OR TO FORMULATE AN ELECTORAL STRATEGY FOR GENERAL MELGAR'S PRESUMED CANDIDACY.

BARTCH

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PAGE 03 TEGUCI 02354 182220Z

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